© Crown copyright • www.metoffice.gov.uk

The Prince says climate research is crucial

11 September 2009

HRH The Prince of Wales has declared that work of the Met Office is crucial, following a briefing about climate change at our headquarters in Exeter.

Climate change is of great concern to The Prince and the visit provided him with the chance to further his knowledge by meeting with some of the world's leading scientists.

In a speech to the staff of the Met Office he said: "Your work here is of crucial importance in informing so many people around the world of the nature of the threat, the huge challenges we all face."

One topic of particular interest was the deforestation of the world''s rainforests, where The Prince's passion in wanting to increase awareness was clear.

The Prince said: "Rainforests have a huge impact on global CO_2 emissions. A fifth of CO_2 pollution from deforestation — that's what deforestation produces. They absorb 15% of emissions from fossil fuels, so while forming 20% of the problem — which in other words is more than the entire transport sector put together — they are actually 35–40% of the solution. And they provide a crucial ecosystem."

Dr Richard Betts, Head of Climate Impacts and expert on the rainforest, said: "There can be no mistaking The Prince's drive and energy in keeping the issues facing the world's rainforests in the public's minds.

"Our discussions affirmed the importance of saving the rainforests around the world, as a vital element in combating climate change."

The Prince's speech on climate change

The Prince's Rainforests Project

Climate Change Centre

© Crown copyright • www.metoffice.gov.uk

HRH The Prince of Wales' speech on climate change

"I am very glad indeed to have this opportunity to join you here at the Met Office to see a little bit of what you are all doing here. I've heard a great deal about your work and I hesitate to interrupt so much of the important activity that you are carrying out here. The other thing is that I hardly dare say anything to such a collection of experts, of one kind or another, gathered here in this atrium.

"But for somebody like myself who spent at least a little bit of time in the past, when I was serving in the Royal Navy and learning to fly in the Royal Air Force, meteorology was quite an important part. I remember spending hours at these met lectures — I did remain awake most of the time — and interestingly talking to both of my sons, now going to the same thing, at least I can relate to what they're learning.

"Having understood a little bit about what weather patterns are all about, to me it's particularly interesting to see what you do here. Of course, it's also interesting looking at the weather forecasts on the television, although being somebody who did spend a certain amount of time at these met. briefings before I went flying and so on, the removal of the isobars drives me absolutely mad — but that's another story altogether.

"But I know that the Met Office Hadley Centre opened back in 1990. Funnily enough, this is exactly the same year in which I made a documentary for the BBC called 'Earth in Balance'.

"I remember during that documentary I interviewed Senator Al Gore in Washington — I had met him 25 years ago and he and I are exactly the same age. We used to talk about all these issues around climate change and the environment. He then wrote a book, shortly after, called *Earth in the Balance*, which intrigued me, but what we were trying to do — what I was trying to do anyway — was draw attention to some of these issues around climate change.

"I have never forgotten at the time the various media reactions there were to the documentary, one said it was a 'curious mix of sermon, uneventful travelogue and apocalyptic warning' and another one said 'anyone could have done it and any professional done it better'. Well that's certainly true, but at the time there weren't an enormous number doing so.

"I looked it up and what I did say, at one point in this film, is that it's surely sensible to take precautions, to take out insurance, even if that means paying a premium. Funnily enough, it's one of the things I have been trying to say for many years — that the precautionary approach, the precautionary principle, is not a bad one to follow. Because at the moment it seems to me we have been busily testing the world to destruction, carrying out a gigantic experiment with the world and with our climate.

"The difficulty, I've always felt, is that the modern world view looks at everything in a fragmented way. We observe Nature from the outside, we no longer participate in it. Yet, when we think about it, we are ourselves Nature, we are a microcosm of the entire microcosm. Until we reconnect ourselves with that understanding of our particular place within Nature, as Nature ourselves, it's going to be very difficult indeed to imagine we can fix all the problems that many of you are indicating through your scientific research and computer modelling. But to fix it just through technological fixery, geoengineering or whatever, it simply will not be enough and it won't be able to be put in quickly enough.

"Your work here is of crucial importance in informing so many people around the world of the nature of the threat, the huge challenges we all face."

The Prince of Wales, Sep 2009

"The thing I haven't understood is why the precautionary approach has so often been seen as anti-science. The trouble is you cannot obtain a degree in common sense from any university, you can obtain a degree in just about everything else, but not in common sense. Today, as you know better than I, we face mounting scepticism about climate change. I heard on the news last night about the numbers of people in Britain who doubt the science of climate change, who are completely sceptical about it. It is astonishing if you think of the level of information that comes out, from the Met Office Hadley Centre for example, or from the British Antarctic Survey.

I went there last year, I don't know how many of you have been there, but an awful lot more people ought to go and see what they are doing with the ice core samples which they have obtained from a depth of 3 km under the ice. These are giving readings of atmospheric carbon back for very nearly a million years, 750,000 years, which they have plotted on a graph. What they have discovered from the ice core samples, as you know better than I, is that the rise in global carbon causing global warming started in the 18th Century at the time of the Industrial Revolution. So it's quite hard, it seems to me, to deny that there's an anthropogenic influence here in terms of what we are doing to the world around us.

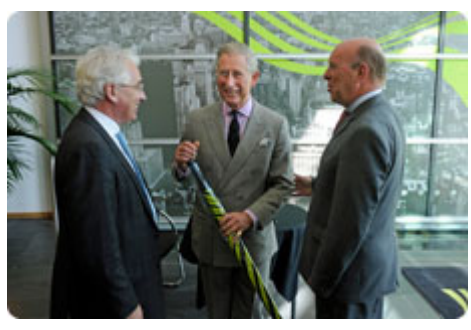
"It also seems as though the scepticism around climate change is based on the idea that there is some kind of conspiracy against capitalism itself. Funnily enough in the Dimbleby lecture, which the BBC, in their wisdom, asked me to do last July, I was trying to suggest that actually we had to look much more carefully at the whole issue of natural capital, because how can you have capitalism unless you think about maintaining natural capital. At the moment we are living off capital, not income, which seems crazy when you think about it in the long-term.

"So we now have CO_2 levels at the highest for 800,000 years. This is one of the reasons why, while you do all the work in producing the information and the science, somebody like myself can only try and see what we can do to make a difference as a result of that science. To try to encourage a different approach, a more integrated approach; an understanding of Nature's capital and an understanding of the importance of ecosystems and the services those ecosystems provide.

"Interestingly, of course, when you think about it, the rainforests in the world form this lifebelt around the planet and they provide an enormous service to all of us, they help to provide — apart from anything else — the weather patterns, the rainfall. I remember meeting in Brazil, earlier this year, a remarkable man called Gerard Moss, who flies around in this small aeroplane all over the Amazon tracking what he calls 'flying rivers' in the atmosphere above the Amazon. These are transporting huge amounts of moisture to other parts of the world helping provide rainfall.

"I'm hugely proud of all the efforts you, ladies and gentlemen, continue to make to wake us out of our lethargy and denial."

The Prince of Wales, Sep 2009



"I'm one of those people who feels that rain is a blessing, even though every now and then it comes — unfortunately now, because of global warming — in ever heavier quantities and at unlikely moments. But when you think about it the rainforests have a huge impact on global CO_2 emissions. A fifth of CO_2 pollution is from deforestation — that's what deforestation produces. They absorb 15% of emissions from fossil fuels, so while forming 20% of the problem — which, in other words, is more than the entire transport sector put together — they are actually 35–40% of the solution. And they provide a crucial ecosystem.

"So one of the things I have been trying to do is to put together a partnership of the public, private and NGO sectors to see if there's a way in which we can provide a solution. And we have come up with various proposals but if…if, by the time we reach Copenhagen in December there's a means by which we can introduce an emergency package to halt deforestation, or bring it under control, not only would it actually buy us time in the battle against climate change because of the services provided by those rainforests, but also it would help very substantially to make a difference to the lives of many of the poorest people on this Earth.

"So, your work here is of crucial importance in informing so many people around the world of the nature of the threat, the huge challenges we all face. And, if I may say so, if this is a conspiracy, then I'm very proud to be have been a part of it for so long for the sake of your grandchildren and my grandchildren. Because that's what we're talking about, pure and simple. That's the only reason why it's worth rushing about and, as I'm accused of doing, 'meddling' in these sorts of issues. And I'm hugely proud of all the efforts you, ladies and gentlemen, continue to make to wake us out of our lethargy and denial. So thank you very much."

The Prince's Rainforests Project

Fair deal for forests

The road to Copenhagen